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ABSTRACT

This paper suggests ways of incorporating parent involvement in the elementary school classroom and at home, and presents the findings of a survey study examining how teachers in a New York City school in the Bronx perceived the influences of parental involvement on the development of children's literacy skills. Following introductory remarks, the paper describes the benefits of early parental involvement for children and discusses how parents may be involved in their child's literacy education as well as barriers to becoming involved. The paper then describes the survey study of 20 kindergarten through second-grade teachers regarding their perceptions of parental involvement and ways to actively involve parents. All respondents felt that parental involvement played a crucial part in a child's literacy development. Teachers felt that parents were the children's first and most important role models. Twenty-five percent of the respondents said that parents in their classrooms were actively involved. The number of parents actively involved out of a class of 25 students was about 10. Sixty percent of the teachers said that at least half of their parents were participating in home literacy activities, with 25 percent saying that close to all their parents were involved in home literacy activities. Thirty-five percent of teachers felt they could incorporate more parents into their classroom through activities such as a newsletter or having a guest storyteller. All the teachers reported using newsletters or phone calls to communicate with parents. All teachers identified strategies they would like parents to implement at home with their children to encourage literacy development. (Contains 14 references.) (KB)

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Teacher's Perceptions of Parental Involvement: How it Effects Our Children's Development in Literacy

Lee Ann Levine

ABSTRACT: This article examines how teachers in a New York City school in the Bronx perceived the influences of parental involvement on the development of children's literacy skills. It suggests ways of incorporating parent involvement in the classroom, as well as at home. Twenty kindergarten through second grade teachers were asked to fill out a survey regarding their perceptions of parental involvement and ways to actively involve parents. The results of the survey showed that parental involvement is seen as a necessity for children to succeed in school. Parental involvement helped children develop a better sense of the importance of developing good literacy skills and that many teachers felt that parents are the most important role model for students.

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown us that the first months and years of a child's life, their experiences with language and literacy can form the basis for their later success. A child's home is his/her first classroom. Dorothy Rich once said "The home environment offers 'teachable moments' that teachers can only dream about."(Rich,1985, p.8). Children who have involved parents have advantages including better grades, test scores, long-term academic achievement, attitudes and behavior (Henderson,1988). Parental involvement in the classroom and at home should be encouraged for a number of reasons including: (1) parental involvement sends a positive message to children about the importance of their education; (2) parental involvement keeps the parent informed of the child's performance; and (3) parental involvement helps the school accomplish

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more. (Akimoff,1996). A Stanford study also found that using parents as tutors brought significant and immediate changes in children's I.Q. scores. (Peterson,1989).

BENEFITS OF EARLY PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Early language and educational experience for children were found to be particularly critical to adult literacy levels. (Siegel and Hanson, 1992). Children who learn to read early, either indirectly through home and family experiences or directly, are typically good readers in the primary grades. (Mason, 1987). Results also indicated that if parents expect their parents to become literate adults, then they must provide guidelines for their behavior and encourage participation in reading and reading related activities. (Siegel et al.,1992). Brown (1989) reported that parent participation in their children's schooling frequently: (1) enhances children's self-esteem, (2) improves parent/child relationship, (3) improves children's academic achievement and (4) helps parents develop positive attitudes towards schools.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO TO BECOME INVOLVED

The results of one study (Akimoff, 1996) indicated that parental involvement is essential in helping children achieve success in school both academically and behaviorally. "Reading aloud to your children and letting them see you reading are two of the best ways to help them on the road to literacy." (Macfarlane, 1994, p. 1). Ordinary daily activities can serve as an occasion for learning, such as pointing out letters or words to your child while shopping or taking a walk. Research demonstrates ((National Academy Press, 1999) that the more children know about language and literacy before they arrive at school, the better equipped they are to succeed at reading. "The most important concept that children need to develop is the functions of print, that print is

a form of communication and that print and books are sources of enjoyment and information." (Brown,1991, p. 5). Playing with children can also serve as a developer in his/her literacy growth, nursery rhymes and songs are great tools to teach and sing with your child. Small children generally learn best while playing, rather than being 'instructed' (Macfarlane, 1994).

Home activities are the activities that parents and children engage in on a day to day basis. Teachers can suggest appropriate television programs for families to view together and send home questions for them to discuss, the discussion can then be carried over into the classroom. (Brown, 1989). Teachers can help foster talks about school, by sending home weekly newsletter to keep parents informed about what their children are currently working on in the classroom. Home activities allow parents flexibility in scheduling, provide opportunities for parents and children to spend time together and offer a relaxed environment. (Brown, 1989).

WHAT HOLDS PARENTS BACK FROM BEING INVOLVED

All teachers have had the frustrating experience of trying to involve parents and getting little or no response. For many parents, a major impediment to becoming involved is a lack of time. (Brown, 1989). Many parents today must work and can not schedule conferences with their child's teacher during school hours. Another study found (Greenberg, 1989) that parents feel uneasy if their cultural style or socioeconomic level differs from those of teachers. In extreme cases parents have become distrustful of the school systems to help them in educating their children, still many parents who will or can not volunteer during regular school hours will take the time to help their children learn, particularly if they can do it at home. (Peterson, 1989).

HOW TO GET PARENTS INVOLVED

Almost all teachers reported talking with children's parent's-- either in person, by phone, on open school nights, and by sending home notes. (Becker and Epstein, 1992). Though these are the most commonly used methods to get parents involved, they are not he only ones open to parents. Parents can get involved by joining Parent Teacher Associations or Parent Teacher Organizations. According to Muriel Hamilton-Lee, "Having parents interact with school professionals as colleagues and peers does a great deal to reduce the barriers between them." (Hamiltion-Lee, 1988, p. 14). Another parent/school involvement is home-based and focuses on activities that parents can do at home with their children. (Brown,1989). Research on parent involvement indicates that parent and teachers can create viable partnerships by engaging in joint learning activities. (Swick,1991).

The American Association of School Administrators(1988) suggests the following "curriculum of the home": high expectations, an emphasis on achievement, role modeling the work ethic, encouraging and providing a place for study, establishing and practicing structured routines, monitoring television, limiting after school jobs, and discussing school events. Parents should encourage children to use literacy in meaningful and purposeful ways, such as helping to write up shopping lists, drawing and writing cards and reading road signs on trips. (Stroup, 2001). To provide the most beneficial type of learning, home activities should be interesting and meaningful, not trivial tasks that parents and children have to "get through". (Brown,1989). Stroup(2001) also suggests keeping reading and writing materials, such as books, magazines, newspapers, paper,

markers, crayons, glue and scissors, accessible to your children so that they can make use of these tools in a variety of language activities.

PURPOSE OF SURVEY

This survey was conducted in order to see how teachers in the early childhood classrooms perceived parental involvement today. I surveyed all the kindergarten, first and second grade teachers in a public school in the Bronx, where I am currently employed. I placed a survey consisting of twelve questions in each teacher's mailbox, with a letter explaining the purpose of this particular survey, the responses where then placed into my mailbox upon completion by the teachers. I decided on these grades because I felt this is where children begin to really develop who they are as students in a classroom setting. It is also in these early grades where children begin to form their views on school and reading that will affect them throughout their lives. I hoped that through the teacher's responses I would be able to get a sense of how parents are currently involved in their children's school life, how it effects children's development in literacy and suggestions for ways of incorporating parental involvement in the classroom, as well as at home.

SURVEY RESULTS

Of the twenty teachers who returned the survey questions one hundred percent felt that parental involvement played a crucial part in a child's literacy development. The teachers felt that the parents were the children's first and most important role models. Many of the teachers felt that the students attitudes towards school and reading was a direct extension of the parents own attitudes. The teachers felt if reading was viewed as important and exciting in the home environment, the children will learn to develop a

natural love for books.

When it came to parental involvement in the actual classroom of the twenty teachers questioned, only 25% said the parents were actively involved. The 25% all said parents came to classroom celebrations on themes or subjects, volunteered to go on trips with the class, and discussed on a weekly basis their children's progress in the classroom. Out of a class of about twenty-five students, the number of parents who were actively involved was only about ten, this proved to be upsetting to most classroom teachers. The other 75% of teachers polled in this survey felt it was possible and important to incorporate parents into the children's classroom. They felt it would give the parents a better sense of what learning's were going on, what methods the teacher used to reach the students, and it would give the students a sense of how important school , education and themselves were to the parents.

When it came to parental involvement with literacy activities at home the teachers felt more parents were doing their part. Sixty percent of the teachers questioned said that at least half of their parents were participating in some literacy activities at home, fifteen percent said that less than half were involved in literacy activities at home and the remaining twenty-five percent of the teachers felt that almost close to all their parents were involved in home literacy activities. The activities ranged from checking homework, reading to and with their children, sharing time on the computer, trips to the library or bookstore, and simply discussing school with the child. One hundred percent of the teachers surveyed, all responded yes, when asked if early contact with books and literature gives students an advantage in school. Most teachers felt it gives the child an edge because they have a better sense of how language and the printed word works.

Also many felt it just help to develop an appreciation for books that can not be taught.

When asked if teachers felt they could incorporate more parents into their classroom, thirty-five percent said yes, through newsletters, having a guest story teller or speaker, inviting them to theme celebrations or simply through volunteer work(such as during the morning routines or center based activities). Thirty percent of the teachers were unsure if they could have parents incorporated into the classroom setting and the last thirty-five percent of the teachers polled felt it would not be plausible to incorporate parents into their classroom environment. They felt either the parents would be unwilling to give up his/her time, that they(the teacher) would not be comfortable with the parents in the room, or that they would not have the appropriate activities for the parents to engage in with the children. Many of the teachers agreed that the reasons parents do not get involved in the classroom setting was due to lack of time, because of the need for them to work. Also fifty percent of the responses indicated that language held the parents back from becoming too involved, the parents see themselves as poor readers, so how can they help their child?

When it came to getting parents involved in classroom activities all the teachers reported using newsletter or phone calls to reach the parents. Only thirty-five percent were able to speak to the parents on a daily basis. Some activities the teacher felt the parents could be of assistance to the children in the classroom with were; (1)reading oneon one with a child, (2)building comprehension by having book talks with children, (3) assisting children in editing their written work and (4)just allowing children to share their work with another adult besides the teacher. The teachers also felt these were important activities that could be carried over into the home setting, because they

were flexible in when they had to be done and they were not just busy work like worksheet. These type of activities are real and meaningful to both the child and the parent.

All of the twenty teacher had different strategies that they would like to see parents incorporating at home with their children. The strategies included; (1)phonics activities- chunking,ending/beginning sounds,(2)word/spelling games,(3)age appropriate books to read with children,(4)educational videos-viewing them with your child and then having a discussion,(5)trips to the library or book store, (6) use of art and music in reading and writing activities,(7) have a special time set up at home where everyone reads- no television, computers, radio or phones,(8)constructing word walls in your child's room, and (9) praising your child for their efforts and letting them know how well they are doing.

CONCLUSION

In conducting this survey it became apparent that teachers view parental involvement as a necessity in order for children to succeed. Parents are viewed as the child's first and most important teachers and their views or feeling on reading are passed on to their children without them even realizing it at times. Though many teachers see the need for ways to actively get parents involved both at home and in the classroom, it is also clear that many are unsure of how to accomplish this task. Many helpful techniques that teachers use in the classroom can be incorporated at home by parents, if the parents were informed on how to use them. Also if parents are brought into the classroom environment, these techniques can become more familiar to them and their child will develop a sense of importance not only about education, but about themselves in their

parents eyes.

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